

Special Considerations for Survivors of Wilms' Tumor

Treatment for Wilms' tumor has proven to be so successful that the majority of children are cured. Many pediatric cancer centers have developed aftercare programs to assess, follow and treat the delayed effects of childhood cancer therapy. All forms of treatment for Wilms' tumor including surgery, radiation and chemotherapy may cause toxicity. Children with localized disease (stage 1 and 2) undergo a nephrectomy and receive two chemotherapy agents. Children with stage 3, 4 and tumors with unfavorable histology Wilms' tumor receive more intensive chemotherapy, radiation therapy and a nephrectomy.

The following chart summarizes the known late effects:¹

Therapy	Late effect
Dactinomycin	No known late effects
Vincristine	Numbness in limbs mostly with tingling and clumsiness
Doxorubicin	Damage to the heart muscle which may lead to heart failure A new cancer or leukemia
Cyclophosphamide	Damage or scarring of urinary bladder tissue Infertility A new cancer or leukemia
Etoposide	Damage to the liver A new cancer or leukemia
Radiation, abdomen	Problems with soft tissue or bone growth Increased risk for developing another cancer Liver damage
Radiation, lung	Problems with soft tissue or bone growth Scarring of the lung with difficulty breathing
Nephrectomy	Proteinuria, hyperfiltration, renal insufficiency, hydrocele (males only)

As discussed briefly, there are many organs that can be affected by cancer and treatment in the person with Wilms' tumor. Treatment for Wilms' tumor generally requires removal of one kidney (nephrectomy). The kidneys are vital organs and filter out waste products from the blood, help to control blood pressure, and stimulate red blood cell production. A person can live a healthy life with only one kidney, but there are some steps to take to protect the remaining kidney in order to keep it as healthy as possible. It is suggested to have medical check-ups to monitor blood pressure and kidney function. Your doctor will let you know how often the follow-up should be. In addition, it is important to drink plenty of water, especially if you are outside in hot weather or involved with sports.¹⁶ Cancer survivors can be at risk for other nutrition-related chronic diseases including diabetes and heart disease.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ The guidelines that have been presented in this article are similar to those proposed by the American Heart Association for maintaining health and minimizing risks for chronic diseases.²⁰

Another Area of Growing Interest: Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

Some cancer survivors choose to incorporate complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) which refers to medical health and lifestyle practices that are used along with or in place of conventional therapies. Examples are biologically based therapies—dietary supplements, antioxidants, herbal medicines, and special diets. Some other types of CAM therapies include relaxation therapy, massage therapy, spiritual healing, and acupuncture. A recent study by Yates *et al*²¹ found that more than 90% of cancer



patients surveyed were using at least one form of CAM (prayer, relaxation and exercise were most widely used). If you are interested in pursuing any forms of CAM therapy it is important to be well informed. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine and the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health can provide current information about different CAM approaches.²²

As a cancer survivor you have completed many different types of therapy as part of your treatment and may be experiencing a variety of complications and side effects. It is important that the clinicians participating in your care continue to provide support, information and resources so that you can make decisions that will result in a healthy lifestyle which has a decreased risk for developing chronic conditions.

(See enclosed insert for complete article references and list of resources.)